CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 22 February 2001, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Juan Enrique Vega (Chile)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 867th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

First of all, I should like, on behalf of us all, warmly to welcome the Director-General for Security and Disarmament in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, His Excellency Mr. Miguel Aguirre de Cárcer, who will be attending our meeting today. I am sure that we all highly appreciate this demonstration of the great importance which the Government of Spain attaches to the Conference, as well as the Director-General's personal commitment to the issue of disarmament.

The Director-General is the only speaker on the list for today. Before giving him the floor, however, I would like first to make an introductory statement on the occasion of the assumption by Chile of the presidency of the Conference.

First I would like to express my gratitude to the outgoing President, Ambassador Christopher Westdal, for the efforts he has made to enable us to get down to work. We have all been witness to his tireless energy in seeking the necessary consensus for adoption of the Conference's programme of work. We have also borne witness to the firm principles to which he has adhered regarding the crucial issues of peace. Accordingly, to our gratitude I should like to add my personal tribute.

You are all well aware of the situation in which we find ourselves. At our plenary meeting last Thursday, Ambassador Westdal gave the Conference an exhaustive analysis of his consultations on the programme of work and vouchsafed some important and thought-provoking conclusions. Among these conclusions, he pointed out the difficulties impeding efforts to achieve agreement on this programme.

Chile is taking on the presidency of the Conference for the first time, having joined the Conference on Disarmament in 1996. My country is convinced of the importance of this body as an instrument whereby the international community can generate better security conditions for all the inhabitants of our planet.

The value that we place on multilateral areas of endeavour is well known. We believe that in such areas humankind has the ability to recognize the principle of the equality of all its members and to show the necessary respect for their values and needs. This is all the more so when the issues that the multilateral world has to address must be accorded a legitimacy that prevails over the logic of force and power.

We have firm convictions in the area of international security and disarmament. These are structured on the basis of the guiding principle of human security and postulate the indivisibility of international security and its prevalence over the security requirements of individual States. As our country has stated before at this same Conference, national security cannot exist in isolation and cannot be invoked to undermine that of others.

(The President)

We are also a member country of the Group of 21, which, in its statements, accords particular importance to nuclear disarmament. For that reason, we are anxious to highlight the validity of the principle of irreversibility both of the nuclear disarmament process and of the control and reduction measures for these weapons and other related armaments, and the need to observe that principle.

Chile is assuming its responsibility to render a service to all members of the Conference and also to its observer States, without prejudice to these clear convictions, which have been made widely manifest through the diplomatic policies that it has consistently applied over the last five years. Hence we shall be speaking less of what we believe, with a view, instead, to remaining very attentive to all of you and to responding faithfully to the general sentiments in this regard.

As I do not belong to the world of disarmament experts, I took pains to review the records of earlier years. I believe that it is very difficult to be original on issues that have been addressed by all presidents upon assuming this brief but intense mandate. Indeed, these problems have been with us for some time now.

The Conference is locked in a stalemate that cannot be protracted indefinitely without damaging its credibility and effectiveness. We know that the responses with regard to the approval of the programme of work must, by and large, stem from the international community around us, but at the same time we must ask whether the Conference itself has any power to influence that community.

That said, if the international community has provided itself with an international forum to negotiate disarmament issues, this is because it deemed it necessary to establish a global forum where decisions are taken collectively. In other words, the existence of the Conference meets the need for a collective response to the requirements of planetary stability and security, which are also of a global nature.

In this challenge, the entire international community has both rights and obligations, since the preservation of our common heritage is at stake. Hence the members of the Conference have borne primary responsibility for the fate of this forum, whose existence and effectiveness we are all anxious to safeguard because it forms part of a process which is not easy to replicate and whose development we must ensure, to ensure that it keeps pace with the times.

This does not mean that the President of the Conference on Disarmament should shirk his duties. Quite the contrary, today more than ever he must be at the Conference's service, making his best efforts to help find a solution to the situation which confronts us. This is on the understanding that it would be difficult for the President to do or go beyond what the parties wish. In other words, his role as a facilitator should be understood in the context of the autonomy of the will of the Conference's members.

(The President)

No president can take upon himself a responsibility that is common to all. The stalemate affecting the programme of work is a problem shared by us all and one that I cannot tackle alone. We must all make efforts to make progress.

We shall be doing this on the basis of document CD/1624, which represents the culmination of a negotiating process and textual fine-tuning that has brought us close to consensus. The Amorim proposal, which, as stated by the 2000 report of the Conference on Disarmament to the General Assembly, has the support of a Conference "as a basis for further intensified consultations", represents a political legacy which we shall carefully preserve. It is the best expression of a process which has involved most of the presidents of the Conference of recent years. My mandate consists in pursuing those consultations and I thank all the groups and China that have expressed support for this approach.

We shall also explore any ideas relating to complementary actions, taken in addition to the main effort, which would enable us to tap fully the resources of the Conference. I must, however, tell you that expressions such as "plan A" or "plan B", graphic and attractive though they be, have the danger of leading us to think that these are alternative options. I believe that, in reality, we have before us just one destination - the programme of work. Accordingly, I would prefer to talk about complementary actions and to see these as tributaries to the main river, which is the programme of work.

We shall endeavour to listen to all and to consult with all. We shall try out new formulae and approaches to give effect to our consultations. We believe in the democratization of international organizations and we shall make transparency and openness our main working tool.

Finally, I would like to make one last comment, with all due respect, on the efforts that have been made and are still being made here. To me, a newcomer, while I waited in that long queue that leads countries and, owing to vagaries of the alphabet, certain ambassadors, as in my case, to the presidency, the situation which we were experiencing seemed comparable to that described by an anarchist Spanish historian when recounting the history of cities. According to him, people discussed and discussed for century upon century, until one day, by consensus, they decided to found the first city.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Miguel Aguirre de Cárcer.

Mr. AGUIRRE DE CARCER (Spain) (translated from Spanish): Allow me to begin by saying how pleased I am to see you presiding over this body. I know that, in the esteemed diplomatic tradition of your country, with which Spain has long-standing and close relations, and by drawing on your extensive political and professional experience, you will do everything possible to bring this difficult task to a satisfactory conclusion. I would also like to extend my thanks to your predecessor, Ambassador Westdal of Canada, for his efforts and to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Petrovsky, the new Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Román Morey, and through them all the staff in the secretariat, who help us so ably with our work.

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Sir, my presence here today, at a time that I would venture to term critical for the Conference, is prompted by compelling and specific reasons. First of all, it responds to our wish to restate the resolute commitment of Spain to the universal and multilateral character of disarmament and arms control that is represented by this body. Spain became a member of the Conference in 1996, after many years on the waiting list, and over the last 25 years it has significantly strengthened its commitment to the various disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regimes. This commitment represents one of the main pillars of our security policy.

Spain signalled its renunciation of nuclear weapons by joining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1986 and the entire system of guarantees and safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, including the relevant additional protocol. Having ratified it on 31 July 1998, we are now also a State party to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and we are the eighth largest contributor to the budget of the organization established under that treaty. Moreover, by sovereign decision of our parliament, Spain is a denuclearized territory and this, in our view, is a major contribution to stability not only in Europe and the Mediterranean but also in the world at large.

Speaking now from a regional, European point of view, Spain has been participating actively in the extensive process to remodel the continent's security structure that has been under way over the last 30 years or so. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and various mechanisms established in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in particular the Vienna Document on confidence and security-building measures and the Open Skies Treaty, and the creation of a common security and defence policy in the context of the European Union, are constituent parts of a collective security concept that has enabled us to reduce to a minimum the risks inherent in the overwhelming geopolitical changes sweeping across the continent since the end of the so-called cold war.

The international landscape against which we are deploying our continued efforts to weave the international legal fabric for arms control is one of particular complexity. Both the challenges that have arisen over recent years to the non-proliferation regime and the rapid evolution of the various strategic visions condition, if not impede, the process of global disarmament. These new factors and the concerns which they provoke must be approached in a spirit of peace and security, in accordance with our obligations under the United Nations Charter.

This, therefore, is the backdrop for the work of our Conference. In the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his message to the Conference at the beginning of this session, the full use of the Conference on Disarmament as a negotiating forum requires "restoring a necessary degree of harmony among the main players. Only then will the Conference be able to strike the right balance between the disarmament priorities of all member States".

The difficulties notwithstanding, we should recall that, over the last few months, various positive events have occurred of considerable importance, including the holding of the

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Millennium Summit last year, that should facilitate the entire process of multilateral disarmament negotiations with which we are concerned and, more particularly, should give our Conference the political impetus that it needs.

Special mention should be made of the NPT Review Conference in 2000. My country attaches special importance to the Final Document of the Review Conference, adopted by consensus of all the participating member States, which is of particular value because it underpins the nuclear non-proliferation regime and at the same time reaffirms the validity of its basic principles, revitalizing the commitment to nuclear disarmament of the nuclear-weapon States.

Among the practical steps identified in the Final Document for the application of article VI of the Treaty, particular note should be taken of the third step, which urges the Conference on Disarmament to take immediate action by starting negotiations on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, with a view to the conclusion of these negotiations within five years.

Moreover, paragraph 4 is also significant for the Conference on Disarmament because it calls for the immediate establishment of an appropriate subsidiary body with a mandate to deal with nuclear disarmament, something that we believe to be of great importance for our work here.

This step forward is, in our view, of great significance but it is not the only progress made in 2000. We also welcome the long-awaited ratification by the Russian Federation of the START II Treaty as well as the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty by 17 more countries. We also hope that the number of ratifications of the Treaty will increase before the second Conference of the States provided for under article XIV of the Treaty, because the entry into force of this Treaty must continue to be a priority for the international community.

We should also highlight the progress that has occurred in other spheres of multilateral negotiation, such as the speeding up of negotiations on a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention. This is a sine qua non for transforming the Convention of 1972 into a truly effective instrument. The deadline that we ourselves have set for its adoption, namely, the fifth review conference scheduled for the end of this year, must be respected, so as not to lose the current momentum. My country will certainly continue to contribute by all means within its reach to the attainment of this very important objective.

The issue of global conventional disarmament has also acquired growing importance, in view of its extensive humanitarian ramifications, given the very widespread use of conventional arms in the many conflicts that, regrettably, are afflicting the world today. The Convention on Prohibitions or Restriction on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Injurious Effects also plays an important role and the possible adoption in the near future of a fifth protocol, on the explosive debris of war, will lend this instrument even greater weight. The regime established by this Convention has now been

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surpassed by the Ottawa Convention, however, which prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of landmines, mandating their destruction. Spain is a party to the Ottawa Convention and is strictly complying with all its commitments, including the destruction of all its landmines. This exercise was completed in November 2000. Spain is also actively cooperating in this area with the Ibero-American region.

Finally, mention must be made in this context of the important current initiatives to avoid the destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons. Along with the already existing regional instruments, in particular that adopted in November 2000 by OSCE, Spain is actively working to ensure that the forthcoming United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects will result in an effective action plan encompassing all aspects of the problem of these weapons.

Notwithstanding these achievements, our Conference continues to come up against obstacles, familiar to us all, which prevent it from resuming its substantive work. Where Spain is concerned, the Conference on Disarmament is a unique forum that should permit all countries that so wish to participate in the discussion and negotiation of regimes for the control and elimination of weapons of mass destruction, because the risks entailed by these weapons pose a threat to us all.

Given all this, we believe that the Conference is an indispensable body at the current time. Not only does it have among its assets the preparation over the last two decades of key instruments for the control of weapons of mass destruction, such as the Convention on Chemical Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, but also, in its previous format, laid the foundations for international collective security in the second half of the twentieth century, attaining such decisive agreements as the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our firm support for the efforts that you and your predecessors have been making to launch a new phase of productive work in the Conference. My delegation already said at the end of the last session that it was in full agreement with the proposal made last year by Ambassador Celsor Amorim of Brazil, on which further work has been done during consultations held over the last few weeks. This proposal is the outcome of many months of effort and builds on work carried out during 2000 by your predecessors, especially by Ambassador Dembri and Ambassador Lint, and it is seen by the Spanish delegation not only as a sound basis on which we should continue to work, but as totally acceptable in all respects. Not all delegations here share that view, however, and it is therefore incumbent upon you and all of us member countries to make every effort to achieve a programme of work that will respect our own priorities and live up to the expectations of the international community.

Mr. President, my country believes that there is a very real risk of this Conference becoming marginalized if it continues in its current deadlock, which would have extremely grave consequences for the entire system of multilateral cooperation. I therefore assure you,

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Mr. President, that my delegation will spare no effort to ensure that we come up, at the earliest possible stage, with a programme of work agreed by consensus, which will support you in the complex task that lies ahead of you.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Director-General for Security and Disarmament, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain, for his statement and for the very kind words addressed to the Chair.

That concludes my list of speakers for today. Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor?

Our work for today is thus concluded. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 1 March 2001, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.